LE
T.B
W

THE CENTENARY OF TENNYSON

1809—1909

A LECTURE
GIVEN
TO THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION STUDENTS
IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE
ON
AUGUST 6, 1909

BY

T. HERBERT WARREN, M.A., Hon. D.C.L.
PRESIDENT OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE
AND
VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

Price One Shilling Net

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1909

3 1761 09704614 8

The J. C. Saul Collection
of
Nineteenth Century
English Literature

Purchased in part
through a contribution to the
Library Funds made by the
Department of English in
University College.

THE CENTENARY OF TENNYSON

1809—1909

A LECTURE

GIVEN

TO THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION STUDENTS
IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE

ON

AUGUST 6, 1909

BY

T. HERBERT WARREN, M.A., Hon. D.C.L.

PRESIDENT OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE

AND

VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY

381375
A. 6. 40

OXFORD

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1909

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK
TORONTO AND MELBOURNE

NOTE

I HAVE to thank my friend Dr. George Macmillan and his House for their kind permission to print in full, for the purposes of this Lecture, the poem 'Parnassus' by Lord Tennyson, from 'Demeter and other Poems', published by them in 1889. I have made too, as will be seen, special use of the 'Life' by Hallam Lord Tennyson and the Annotated edition of the Poems, in the Eversley Series, both published by them.

T. H. W.

THE CENTENARY OF TENNYSON

1809–1909

MEN, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new:
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

'Locksley Hall' (*written about* 1830, *publishea* 1842).

Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all
My friends and brother souls,
With all the peoples, great and small,
That wheel between the poles.

Epilogue to 'Charge of the Heavy Brigade' (*published* 1885).

IN attempting, no easy task, to render due tribute to the great name and shining memory of the poet who wrote these lines, on this, the hundredth anniversary of his birthday, I count myself very fortunate that I am permitted to speak to this audience and in this place, for both are singularly appropriate, and I feel that, by their fitness at least, this Commemoration will be in

some measure adequately and happily honoured. Let me first remind you that Tennyson, as his son records, 'especially approved of the University Extension Movement, for spreading higher education throughout local centres in Great Britain.' Still more, I feel assured, would he have applauded that further development which carries this teaching yet wider, and brings students to the old Universities from every portion of the civilized world. Your gathering represents, I believe, almost every land and language in which Western literature is cherished, and poetry akin to our own has been, and is, written and read. We shall have to-day, we of England, I feel sure, the warm and close sympathy of those of other lands, in our commemoration of our great and representative national genius and poet of the Age which has just closed. For Tennyson was—you will honour him none the less for it—pre-eminently an English poet. No poet, not even Shakespeare, has better depicted for its own sons, and others, the English country, or struck the English note more truly, or celebrated and encouraged in more heart-stirring songs the English achievements by land and sea. He was, too, for the Victorian Age, in its later phase, a poet of Empire, even as Shakespeare was a poet of Elizabethan expansion, triumph, and adventure. But has he not written—

> That man's the best Cosmopolite who loves his native country best?

Tennyson was genuinely cosmopolitan. His sympathies from the first were with all the world, for its liberty and well-being. As a lad he burned to go to Greece and take part in the War of Independence of 1827. As a young man, he actually went, at the risk of his life, with his bosom friend, Arthur Hallam, to the Pyrenees, to assist the cause, as he believed it, of freedom for Spain. Nursed in classic Cambridge, he studied for himself the language and literature of France,

Germany, and Italy. And except Shakespeare, and in some ways Byron, there is, I suppose, no English poet so generally known to foreign readers. If translation be any test, there are translations of some or other of his poems into French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, Hungarian, and Czech. Of several of the poems there are many. Of 'Enoch Arden', the most popular, there are at least six or eight into French, and even more into German. In France, the land of distinguished and distinguishing criticism, he has been the subject of a continuous stream of notices and reviews, extending from those of Taine and Filon down to the admirable renderings of M. Morel and the fine and sympathetic article of M. Faguet in the 'Quarterly Review' of last April.

From Germany, the home of thorough scholarship and sympathetic translation, he received perhaps his earliest continental recognition. Ferdinand Freiligrath hailed Tennyson as a true poet in 1842, and himself rendered some of his poems into German. A few years ago an indefatigable Polish scholar, Dyboski, lavished on him the erudite labour usually bestowed only upon authors long canonized by antiquity, and collected the results from a number of learned periodicals into a capacious tome worthy of a critic of Homer or Aeschylus. Within the bounds of the English-speaking race, it is worth noting that his 1842 volume found immediate recognition in the United States of America, from Hawthorne and Emerson, above all from his contemporary Edgar Allan Poe, who, with youthful enthusiasm, boldly placed him at once among the foremost poets of all time, while the earliest commentaries of merit came from Canada—the study of the 'Princess' by Dr. S. E. Dawson having a high and special value—and from Anglo-India.

But Tennyson has a still more individual claim on this audience. Your course this year is on Italy, her place in the world's history, her contribution to the

thought, the knowledge, the art of the world. What could more fitly form an interlude in this course than that you should turn aside—if it is aside—for an hour to honour Tennyson? From his earliest days he loved Italy, her land, her language, her learning, her art. He began his study when a lad with his brothers and sisters and that friend who was more than a brother, who indeed introduced them all to things Italian.

> O bliss, when all in circle drawn
> About him, heart and ear were fed
> To hear him, as he lay and read
> The Tuscan poets on the lawn.

He travelled often to Italy. Of all his dainty and delicious and musical pieces there is none which better deserves these epithets than one, the outcome and the record of such travel, 'The Daisy,' beginning:

> O Love, what hours were thine and mine,
> In lands of palm and southern pine;
> In lands of palm, of orange-blossom,
> Of olive, aloe, and maize and vine.

His entertainment of Garibaldi is historic. He drew from Italy the subject of one of his plays, he has rendered the tribute of life-long love and admiration to the greatest of her ancient even as to the greatest of her modern poets, to Catullus and Horace and Virgil, and to Dante; and he has found among Italian men of letters, such as Paolo Bellezza, Saladino Saladini Pilastri, or Gaetano Negri, warm and discriminating admiration.

Your presence then aids me, and I am aided too by the thought of the place in which I stand. We are in Oxford, and in the Sheldonian Theatre. It was in this very building, and from this seat, that, fifty-four years ago, Oxford, by the hands of her Chancellor, Lord Derby, himself orator, scholar, and poet, bestowed upon a singularly illustrious band the highest honour in her power, the Honorary D.C.L. Degree. It was done with acclaim, indeed with 'tumult of acclaim'. The

year was one of the years of the Crimean War, and the poet came in company with some of the heroes of that conflict. It was an exciting occasion. His son's Life tells us somewhat of the story. I will add a line or two from other sources. The undergraduates of those days were very vociferous. Even before Tennyson entered the Theatre he could hear from afar their shouts, which, he said, were like those of the Roman mob, crying *Christianos ad leones*, and when he came in 'he felt', as he told Max Müller, 'all the time as if he were standing on the shingles of the sea-shore, the storm howling and the spray covering him right and left.'

A friend of mine, Sir Charles Cave, has told me that he still remembers how an undergraduate shouted from the gallery amid general merriment, 'Did your mother call you early, Mr. Tennyson?'

Then, says the Life, 'in the evening at Magdalen the poet had long talks with Gladstone and Montalembert.' I naturally had the curiosity, when I read this record, to know what was the theme of this converse held in my College by this great trio, a veritable Dialogue of Plato, and I had the audacity to write to Mr. Gladstone and inquire. The answer, if not what I hoped for, was interesting. Mr. Gladstone wrote:—

I am grieved to send you a disappointing answer. But reference to a very arid journal, containing little but dry bones, shows me that on the day in question (June 20, 1855) I saw Mr. Tennyson, then almost a stranger to me, but not in such a way as to give occasion for any serious record of the interview. Public life is cruelly absorbing. I doubt whether in any individual case it has been more absorbing than in mine. One of the serious results is, the risk of knowing nobody outside the pathways of politics. A book like the 'Life of Tennyson' makes me feel how fearful have been my losses in this matter.

But I must attack my main subject and ask you to go back with me, not only fifty, but a hundred years, and looking over the century which has run its course, to

consider what are the place and part, which he filled and played, in whose name we are met.

Tennyson was born, then, on August 6, 1809, a hundred years ago to-day. A hundred years ago! So far and yet so near—so near and yet so far! So near—there are certainly some men and women who were living then who are still living now. If they cannot go back in memory quite to that year, there are many, the grand-parents, or it may be the parents, of some of us, who remember the epoch, some even the decade to which it belongs. Alfred Tennyson was the fourth son in a long and long-lived family. Of his brothers all have passed away, but of his sisters, the youngest, born eight years after himself, Cecilia, the lady whose wedding is celebrated in the Epilogue to 'In Memoriam', died only this spring, and one, a year nearer himself in age, still survives. When I myself first entered Magdalen as a young Fellow, the Senior Fellow of the College was a genial, sporting old Doctor of Divinity, who had been born in that very year and only three weeks after Lord Tennyson. He only died in 1896. He was a boy at Eton, an undergraduate at Oxford, with Mr. Gladstone, and had moved step by step with the generation to which both poet and statesman belonged. He remembered Disraeli as an audacious youngster canvassing the electors of High Wycombe. He used to describe the Oxford of old days, and in particular how the coaches came and went from the famed old Angel Inn, which occupied the ground upon which the Examination Schools, where most of your work is being done, now stand. I always thought that he enjoyed some of the remarkable vigour of those born in that remarkable year, 1809. For indeed it was an *annus mirabilis*. Aristotle tells us that there are good and bad crops in the human generation as there are in the products of the soil. 1809 was the birth year in England, as 1909 is reminding us, of Darwin and Tennyson and Gladstone, of FitzGerald and Lord

Houghton: in Germany of Mendelssohn, in America of Abraham Lincoln and Edgar Allan Poe and Oliver Wendell Holmes. It was a good year in which to be born. It did not seem so at the time. Let us put ourselves back, in imagination, in Oxford in 1809, and at the time of Tennyson's birth. It is a year of melancholy moment for Oxford, and England, and Europe.

> Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
> As his corpse to the rampart we hurried:
> Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
> O'er the grave where our hero we buried.

The poem indeed is not yet written. The young Irish student whose passport, slight but sufficient, to immortality it is to form, will only enter this year at Trinity College, Dublin; but the sad event is fresh in our memory. Sir John Moore has fallen at Corunna in the opening days of the year. Napoleon himself has indeed left Spain, but after regaining Madrid. The English have been driven to the sea. Saragossa has been taken. We have to begin all over again. The Peninsular War still lies before us. We are not in fear for our own island, for it is only four years since Nelson fell in triumph on the deck of the 'Victory' at Trafalgar, and purchased us immunity from invasion. But beyond the seas we are everywhere in disaster. Even the rising star of Sir Arthur Wellesley is for a moment obscured. He has just won the battle of Talavera and become Lord Wellington, but has been obliged to retire into Portugal. The Earl of Chatham and Sir Richard Strachan have waited on each other too long, and the Walcheren Expedition has ended in ignominious collapse. The victory of Wagram has been followed by the Treaty of Vienna. Andreas Hofer—*der treue Hofer*—the hero of Tyrol, has been shot at Mantua as a rebel. The Pope is in prison and the Papacy in abeyance. The fortunes of freedom seem everywhere to have touched their *nadir*. Yet England is a queer place. (At home England then

must have been not unlike England now.) Amid all these foreign distractions time is found not only to imprison Sir Francis Burdett in the Tower for endeavouring to bring about Reform, but also to watch Captain Barclay walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours. And if we could only look forward over the hundred years which are to follow, how different would our feelings be! So near and yet so far. Everything that belongs to our lives, that makes the modern world, seems to have happened between now and then. To go back; Byron has left Cambridge, he has come of age, has taken his seat in the House of Lords, has published his 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers', which has already run into a second edition, and has just set off with Hobhouse on Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Landor, who is to live till 1864 and to receive then the tribute of that youngest and last of the Victorian poets, who died a few months ago, 'the eldest from the youngest singer that England bore,' has left Oxford some years, but Shelley has yet to come and go. He will not arrive till next year from Eton, an awkward, shy, girlish freshman, genteel yet untidy, with his little head, freckled face, and crop of bushy brown hair crowning his tall, swaying form, as his brother freshman, Hogg, describes him, to depart again before the year is out. Eight years still must elapse before another budding poet, a vivacious, pugnacious youngster, not much more than five feet high, with thickly clustering gold-brown hair and hazel eyes, liquid-flashing, forcible, inspired—so the painter Haydon portrays for us the poet Keats—will be seen in Oxford, and near the new Schools, spending a few delightful weeks just over the way in Magdalen Hall, scribbling 'Endymion' while his friend Bailey studies the classics for the examinations which have just been instituted, or jumping into his boat and 'skimming into a bed of rushes and thereby becoming naturalized river folks'. Times far away, yet so near to us, for the Head of Magdalen Hall of that

day did not die till 1868, only two years before I myself, as a schoolboy, first saw Oxford. Why, the Head of my own College in 1809, old Dr. Routh, could go back in memory another fifty years to the days of Johnson and Gibbon and Gray, and yet he lived till 1854!

But the real 'era' of the poet is not his first, but his twenty-first, birthday, when he has reached years of discretion, and has passed through the impressions of childhood into those of adolescence and early manhood. Let us move on to Tennyson's coming of age and to 1830. This is indeed a notable year for him. He is now at Cambridge, has been there two years, has found his friends there, that wonderful set whom we all know, for all the world came to know them. He has gained the prize for a Prize Poem on the amazing subject 'Timbuctoo'. What is far more, he has published his own first volume, the 'Poems chiefly Lyrical', he has won his place and the priceless friendship of Arthur Hallam. He has paid his first visit to the Continent, made his journey with Hallam to the Pyrenees and formed impressions which will colour all his after life and writings. In the interval between 1809 and 1830 the poets of his youth whom we mentioned have passed away, all young, all tragically: Keats, the first, by disease in 1820, then Shelley, drowned in 1821, and then Byron, in war, though not indeed in battle, and falling for a noble cause, in 1824. When Byron died, Tennyson and his friends felt as if the world was ending. In 1830 they felt as if it was just beginning, and indeed this and the next three years were of immense and intense moment to them and to the world. For these years, too, were truly the real beginning of the England which we know. In 1830 the first railway was opened. 1831–2 were the years of the battle and victory of Reform. 1833 abolished Slavery in the British dominions. Here, in Oxford, we may remember that it saw the birth of the Oxford Movement. It was in June, 1833, that

Newman on his way home from Sicily and from death's door, wrote, in the Straits of Bonifacio, the verses which, as he modestly says, 'afterwards became well known', 'Lead, kindly Light'. He reached Oxford in July, just in time to hear Mr. Keble preach that Assize Sermon in the University Pulpit on 'National Apostasy' which, as he wrote, 'he always considered and kept as the birthday of the Movement.' A month later Tennyson was taking what he did not then know to be his last farewell of 'his friend, the brother of his soul', Arthur Hallam. Hallam died on September 15, 1833, at Vienna. Just at the close of 1832 Tennyson had published his second volume, his 'Poems', dated 1833, but really given to the world at the end of the previous year. The time then, was for him, one full of event, spiritual and intellectual, moral and material, political and personal. For the moment the personal prevailed. Tennyson was crushed, but the world went on. In 1837 Queen Victoria came to the throne and the Victorian Age began. Since then we have seen the introduction of the steamship and the railway, electricity made the servant of sight and sound and communication, photography, the spectroscope, a hundred, a thousand other inventions; wars that have reconstructed the world, revolutions and reforms sometimes stormy, sometimes peaceful; the final establishment of the American and French Republics, the Unification of Germany, of Italy, of Canada, of Australia, of South Africa, the disappearance of the 'Temporal power', the introduction of parliamentary institutions into Russia and into Turkey. The movements of the mind and the material development of the world have been not less notable. In the same term and at the same age as Tennyson, another undergraduate entered Cambridge, whose name and thoughts have filled the world and whose work she has just been celebrating, Charles Darwin. When Tennyson was a young man he seemed to anticipate these great movements.

Ev'n now we hear with inward strife
A motion toiling in the gloom—
The Spirit of the years to come
Yearning to mix himself with Life.

A slow-develop'd strength awaits
Completion in a painful school;
Phantoms of other forms of rule,
New Majesties of mighty States—

The warders of the growing hour,
But vague in vapour, hard to mark;
And round them sea and air are dark
With great contrivances of Power.

So he wrote in the beautiful piece beginning 'Love thou thy land', the date of which we now know to have been about 1833, though it was not published till 1842. Another piece, less well known, belongs to the same period, 'Mechanophilus,' published only in his last volume at the end of his life, but written, as we are told, 'in the time of the first railways.' By an interesting symmetry of coincidence Tennyson's long life exactly fills the space, with the exception of a narrow margin at either end, of the nineteenth century. Born nine years after it had begun, he died eight years before its close. Its central year, 1850, was the central year of his own life, the year in which he married, in which he became Poet Laureate, in which he published 'In Memoriam'. He reflected, his poems reflect, the evolution of this long and eventful period. At first and for long he was before his time. As Mr. Romanes said, and Mr. Andrew Lang has demonstrated, he anticipated much of the main ideas of Darwin. Then, as younger generations came up, he remained abreast of his time. Perhaps towards the end of his day, perhaps still more since his day, he may appear to some to have fallen behind. Yet even now there are some of his words which seem even truer than when they were written. The 'nations' airy navies', 'pilots of the purple twilight', and all the rest, are just beginning to appear in sight and to be realized, those visions of the world and the future,

which he saw first in 1830, and wrote of in the earlier 'Locksley Hall'. His language about the Empire in the same way is only now receiving its full realization, so that to-day he stands side by side with the far younger Rudyard Kipling as the English poet of Empire.[1] He may not, at this moment, have the credit for his originality, and for the very reason that much that he discovered and revealed has become so much of a truism and a commonplace and that he himself is, as the French say, *connu*, and has taken his place as a classic of the schoolroom and the University Lecture. As Mr. G. K. Chesterton said a few years ago so acutely, he may have disappeared from our consciousness because he has so thoroughly conquered us, and filled our thought, that we are unaware of the process. But to-night, looking back over this great century, let us render him his large meed of desert. It may be that we are at an awkward distance, just too far to feel his living influence, not far enough to estimate it as part of the history of the world. But if the latter be true we have some compensations—we are still near enough to recover something of that reality which has so recently passed away by the aid of a tradition yet living.

What was he like then, this poet who would have been a hundred years old to-day had he been living with us now, who could thus reflect so much of the century upon which we look back? His poems tell us best, and next to his poems the admirable classic life of him written by his son, and the annotations, mainly the poet's own, which his son has added to the poems. Those who knew him and are still with us can tell us something more. The portraits, drawn, painted, sculptured, or photographed, may help us. If you will

[1] I have received only as this Lecture is passing through the press, a letter from Dr. S. E. Dawson in Canada, emphasizing, what I entirely endorse, that the 'Princess' has a yet unexhausted message for the present moment on the true position of woman.

go to the delightful, refined, select Centenary Exhibition still open at 148 New Bond Street, and spend there a quiet hour or two, you may learn much.

First of all, he was throughout his life a splendid specimen of the human race. 'As a young man he was singularly fine looking, a sort of Hyperion,' said his contemporary FitzGerald: 'Apollo and Hercules in one,' as he wrote elsewhere, tall, six feet in height, broad-chested, strong-limbed, large-handed, with waving hair, dark, like one of southern race, of great physical strength. I myself only knew him when he was quite old. I well remember, I shall never forget, the first impression he made on me. *Qualis artifex!* were the words which rose to my lips, 'a great poet is a great artist.' Sensitiveness, imagination, discrimination, the critical, the creative spirit, seemed to breathe from his mien and face. Something of the same impression I received when I first saw Watts, and indeed they had not a little in common, these two friends and brother artists. It was only later that I came to see how strong he was, even in his extreme old age; how magnificently strong he must have been in his prime. This union of strength and sensitiveness must always have been his. You see it in the portraits. Some of them show the one quality more than the other. The best show both. Samuel Lawrence's noble portrait of him as a young man shows, I think, both. The sensitive and the intellectual perhaps predominate in the very interesting early drawing, the earliest known portrait, that by Mrs. Weld. Woolner's two busts display more of the strength. It is perhaps more natural for sculpture to do so, but in the beardless one the sensitiveness is not wanting. Of Watts's fine portraits, some I think give less than the strength. The sensitiveness amounts to a troubled, almost vacillating sensitiveness. This may have been true in certain epochs, or at certain moments, of his life. Palgrave writes of his first impressions in 1849: 'He had the look of one who had suffered greatly: strength

and sensitiveness blended.' The last portraits by Watts—the Trinity, Cambridge, portrait, for instance—seem to me truer to the poet's noble yet sensitive strength. For this was the man. He could not have been either the man he was, or the poet he was, without both. His friends found his portrait in the lines meant to be a Prologue to the 'Gardener's Daughter', but his son tells us it was not his intention that they should give such a portrait, and though they have some general characteristics of his, they do not satisfy me as individual enough. 'Tall and broad-shouldered as a son of Anak, with hair, beard, and eyes of southern darkness; something in the lofty brow and aquiline nose suggests Dante, but such a deep, mellow, chest voice never could have come from Italian lungs,' so Bayard Taylor described him in 1857.

Carlyle's somewhat earlier descriptions are well known. 'A Lifeguardsman spoiled by writing poetry.' 'One of the finest-looking men in the world; a great shock of rough, dark, hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; a massive, aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate'; 'bronzed'; 'almost Indian looking'; 'his voice musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between.' Such are some of the touches by which at different times he described him about 1840.

His old friend Professor Cowell (who taught Fitz-Gerald to read Omar) wrote in a letter to Dr. Rouse: 'He was, as you say, a really great man. He looked one and he was one.'

Sidney Dobell said finely: 'If you had been told that that man had written the "Iliad" you would not have been surprised'; while Henry Reeve, who had known him from youth, spoke of his 'imposing appearance', when he was nearly 70, at his son Lionel's wedding in Westminster Abbey: 'He looked round the Abbey as if he felt the Immortals were his compeers.'

Perhaps after his early sorrows and anxieties had passed away, after he had married, and 'the peace of God had passed into his heart', the troubled expression

may also have passed, but the same combination of strength and sensitiveness, the 'most massive yet most delicate' of Carlyle, I think always remained, and I think too it was characteristic of the man. Independent, standing in his own strength, fearless, candid as a child, he was yet, as he said himself, 'a shy beast loving his own burrow,' and sensitive. Long after his world-wide fame had been firmly established he was still sensitive to criticism, even when he knew it was wrong. I remember one of his own characteristic utterances in which he put this himself in his own way. We had walked out from Farringford in the direction of the Needles. On our outward journey we had talked of fame, and I remember thinking how strange it was to be thus walking and talking with one whose thoughts and words would affect the world and whose memory would be preserved like the memory of the great of old, like that of Sophocles or Virgil, perhaps many thousand years hence. It was like being in a little boat towed for a short time by a great ship that is about to sail to the ends of the world. As we turned back in our walk our converse fell upon Plato and the Tenth Book of the 'Republic', of which he was very fond, with the 'Metempsychosis' as it is called, that famous idea that the souls of the dead, when their time comes to return from the other world to a renewed life in this, are allowed to choose what lives they will have, and how men then chose the lives of beasts and birds, while birds and beasts chose the lives of men; how the King Agamemnon chose the life of an eagle; and Ajax, the strong hero, the life of a lion; and the scurrilous jester, Thersites, the life of a monkey; and the shrewd, world-worn, famous Ulysses, the life of a private man with no cares.

'If I had to choose life over again,' said Tennyson, in his deep voice, half humorously, 'I wouldn't be a poet, I'd be a pachyderm.' Then, seeing me smiling, 'I don't mean a hippopotamus,' he went on, 'I mean I'd choose to be a thick-skinned fellow with no nerves.' A few years later I was reminded of this when another

great artist and man of letters, George Meredith, was talking to me of Tennyson and his relations with him in his own younger days. I had strolled down Box Hill, on the top of which I was staying, one sunny Sunday afternoon in September, about fifteen years ago, to see the old novelist. I found him lurching round and round his garden in the sun. The paralytic lameness which later on crippled him so sadly had already begun, but there was no lameness in his mind. He talked with the most delightful brilliancy on a number of subjects. We touched for a few minutes on Tennyson. He told me that when he was a young man he had a great admiration for the early poems of Tennyson, and he sent him, in some trepidation, his first volume.

This came out, it may be remembered, in the year 1851. Tennyson wrote back a very pretty letter, saying that there was one poem in the book which he had been going up and down stairs repeating, and that he had told his wife he wished he had written it. This, I gathered, from something Tennyson had told me, was 'Love in the Valley'.

Tennyson then asked him to come and stay the night with him at Twickenham, where he was living at that time. Next morning, as they walked out towards the Thames, Tennyson began, 'Apollodorus says I am not a great poet.' Apollodorus was the 'gifted Gilfillan', as he was called, a Scotch Minister and critic, author of a 'Gallery of Literary Portraits' published in 1845, who took himself, and was taken in those days, with a seriousness now forgotten. 'I said,' quoth Meredith, 'Why should you mind what such a man says?' To which Tennyson replied, 'I mind what *everybody* says.' Swinburne told him, Meredith went on, that Tennyson once said to him that a review in a halfpenny newspaper had caused him a sleepless night.

Meredith proceeded to make the criticism that Tennyson always, when he was praised, repeated his performance; thus he wrote a sequel to the 'May Queen', and he wrote ultimately a second 'Locksley

Hall'. To this I replied, 'Very ultimately, after sixty years,' and Meredith with a laugh admitted that this was so. As to the criticism, I do not know that it amounts to much. It seems a very natural and innocent thing to follow up a success, and there appears to be no reason in the nature of things why *encores* should be confined to music or to sung poems. If it is a fault, Meredith himself fell into it, for he took the original 'Love in the Valley' which Tennyson liked so much, and which consisted of eleven stanzas, and quite rewrote it, adding fifteen more. It is amusing to think that Tennyson told me that by so doing Meredith had spoilt it. The fact is, as every one knows who has had to do with real original artists, no two see alike. They would not be the individual geniuses they are, if they did. Tennyson was before all things a critical artist. If he was critical of others, he was far more critical of himself. This went with, and was part of, his sensitiveness. No poet probably ever deferred more to what he thought was good criticism, and he was very modest. But he was so often blamed and so often praised too for the *wrong* thing, and he found the praise perhaps even more trying than the blame.

> You did late review my lays,

as he once wrote to 'Crusty Christopher'.

> You did mingle blame and praise;
> When I learnt from whom it came,
> I forgave you all the blame,
> I could not forgive the praise.

My first talk with him, I remember, was about criticism. He came into the room with the 'Spectator' in his hand; the organ in those days of his friend and one of his best critics, as he himself thought, the late Mr. R. H. Hutton. He began saying something about criticism. I mentioned the name of the late Mr. John Addington Symonds, who had encouraged me to write to him. He said, 'Do you think Symonds a good

critic?' I replied that in many ways I did, but that I would rather hear whom he thought a good critic than suggest any myself. He replied, 'I don't know. I sometimes think a good critic's very rare, rarer than a good poet. I used to think that Goethe was one of the best critics. He always tried to see all the good he could in a man.' Something of these ideas he embodies in the little poem entitled 'Poets and Critics', when written I know not, but first published in his last volume, in 1892. It always seems to me in tone and form very like Goethe. How good and kindly his criticisms were may be seen from those scattered up and down throughout his son's Life, specially concentrated in certain chapters. He was aided by an admirable memory which enabled him to illustrate his judgements most delightfully.

His genius for criticism is shown in the very first of his letters preserved, written when he was only twelve years old. It was cultivated all through his life, for he was a real scholar. I remember well how when I was an undergraduate, Browning's 'Aristophanes' Apology' came out, and I and my friends were greatly impressed, as indeed we had reason to be, by the poet's erudition, in particular by his acquaintance with the fragments and the *scholia* of the Greek drama, and I said to Mr. Jowett, then the Master of my College, in the way young men do, 'I think, Sir, you know Mr. Browning. Isn't he a great Greek scholar?' 'A very home-spun scholar,' the Master replied. I think perhaps he may have done less than justice to his friend, but I have come to see what he meant. He thought and spoke very differently of Tennyson or of Swinburne.

What he thought of Tennyson he has recorded in the most interesting 'Personal Recollection'. But I doubt whether, in his preference for literary scholarship, the Master has quite done justice to Tennyson's learning. In the period after he left Cambridge he evidently read not only widely but deeply, and shows

an acquaintance with authors generally known only to professional scholars.

The fact is, justice has hardly been done to Tennyson's intellectual force. Because he was so much of an artist, because he fulfils so amply in his poetry Milton's canon, that poetry should be 'simple, sensuous, and passionate', because his intuitions were so strong, because he was so obviously the *vates sacer*, the 'inspired seer', because he clung to the old and respected traditions and forms, while looking himself below and beyond them, his powers as a critical scholar and a scientific thinker and a metaphysical philosopher have been underrated. Matthew Arnold underrated him because he was not a bookish 'higher critic', and he has been compared unfavourably with Browning because he is not difficult in the way that Browning is difficult, but there is as much 'fundamental brain-work', as it is called, underneath his poetry as underneath that of Browning or of any poet of the century. He was not indeed an *esprit fort*, and the *esprits forts* are too fond of claiming the monopoly of intellect, but he certainly 'saw life steadily and saw it whole'. Thackeray, it may be remembered, called him the wisest man he knew. If he did not see it more whole than Mat Arnold, at any rate his poetry reflects a far more various and complete view. It is indeed this breadth of view, this sanity and this variety which constitute to some minds Tennyson's weakness, but in reality, I think, his strength. Poetry should be passionate, and the most obvious passions are love and hate, and the most intense at certain moments in life are personal love and hate. There are other loves and hates—love of country, political animosities. These too may fire the poet, and there are loves and hates, intellectual and spiritual, which may again speak in poetry. But these are naturally more long-lived and more diffused over life than the personal and individual emotions. Thus poets who have felt and have dealt specially with one or two

seem in some ways to be more poetic. Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine, Burns, Poe; they seem essentially poetic. The poets of a more balanced and various disposition, in whom these feelings are more mixed and diffused, do not sting us with such fiery compulsion. Thus Catullus, in whom the personal *odi* and *amo* are so intense, or Lucretius, whose intellectual passion is so trenchant and tremendous, appeal to some minds more than Horace and even Virgil. This intense passion is to be found in Tennyson here and there. You will find it in 'Fatima', with its echo of Sappho and Catullus. You will find it in the incomparable love-lyric 'Come into the garden, Maud'. The intellectual passion of Lucretius may be paralleled out of the 'Two Voices', or 'In Memoriam', or in 'Lucretius' itself. But these are only a part of Tennyson. It is his variety that has made him so popular. Love of his country, of home and friends, his political, worldly wisdom, his humour, these have gained him other friends and followers. I have noticed that those critics who incline to underrate Tennyson almost always make some qualification and confess themselves surprised at his excellence in some one exceptional way. Swinburne—not indeed that he thought little of Tennyson, for he was an avowed and attached admirer—was carried off his feet, rapt into his most superlative rhapsodies, by 'Rizpah'. George Meredith, after telling me that he ranked Tennyson with Tasso, in the second order of poets, went on to say that he 'thought there was no poet with whose writings he was acquainted who had painted so many "inimitable vignettes"'. Professor Oliver Elton speaks of the handful of unassailable songs which place Tennyson for several instants near Shakespeare; and FitzGerald, who thought poorly of the later poems of Tennyson, coming suddenly on the 'Northern Farmer', found himself to his surprise crying over the 'old brute', as he called him, touched by the 'truth and tragedy' of the description.

There are many legends current about the poet's 'roughness and gruffness', as it is called. There always are such legends about the personal peculiarities of genius. Some are mere gossip, some amusing and harmless, whether true or not, some not overkind nor overtrue. 'There never yet,' as he sang himself,

Was noble man, but made ignoble talk.

As I have said, he was shy, he was sensitive, he disliked being lionized or run after. Poets differ like other people. Horace enjoyed being pointed out as he walked along the street. Virgil ran into the nearest shop to hide himself. Tennyson was like Virgil. An amusing story, and one which may be taken as typical, is the well-known one about Mrs. Cameron, his very old friend, who took many licences, and one day sprung, as she often did, a party upon him, and when he did not receive them over-cordially, said, 'Alfred, I brought these people to see a lion, and behold a bear!'

Again, you will hear it said that his son's 'Life' gives too flattering and smooth a picture, that the 'seamy side' is not shown. There was none to show, no side that by any stretch deserves to be called 'seamy'.

And was the day of my delight
As pure and perfect as I say?
The very source and fount of Day
Is dash'd with wandering isles of night.

Foibles even the best have, of course. If the picture is a bright one, after all that is as it should be. His was an heroic and a glorious figure.

All I can say is that I found him consistently most kind, and when I got over the first shyness, most genial and cordial. His playfulness, his humour, were as remarkable as his profundity and his sublimity. But perhaps what struck me most was his transparent candour. 'A terrible sagacity,' as poor Cowper says, 'informs the poet's heart.' It was so with Tennyson. He saw through the shams, the conceit, the personal

motives of so many who came to him with some axe or some penknife to grind, and he could not help showing that he saw through them, and sometimes telling them so.

Truth-teller was our England's Alfred named.

The general popularity which Tennyson attained in England was indeed immense. He told Locker-Lampson that as a boy he had desired it. In later life he viewed it more justly. But it is certainly no crime in one who never wrote down to gain it, and who made special appeal to the learned even more than the unlearned. It will probably be conceded that he was the ideal Poet Laureate, that he re-created, if he did not create, the honour of that office. He was so, because he was sincere in his loyalty to the powers that be, to his Queen and his country, because his laureation received the approval alike of the study and the street, of the scholar at his desk, and of the man of action in the forum or the field. It may be doubted if, whatever may be thought of him in esoteric circles, even now that popularity has waned. My friend Dr. George Macmillan allows me to say that in the twenty-five years during which they have been his publishers, his House has printed nearly half a million copies of the well-known complete one-volume edition, and that, although the earlier poems, as fast as they have come out of copyright, have been republished by almost every publisher of note. He is the one great poet of the Victorian era whose effigy will be found in that modern 'Temple of Fame' or of 'Notoriety,' Madame Tussaud's Exhibition, along—the selection is interesting—with Chaucer and Shakespeare, Burns and Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Macaulay, and Victor Hugo. Every New Year's Day sees Calendars of Shakespeare and Dickens and Tennyson. Of Tennyson last year I noted at least three by different publishers. I believe there has been no Academy Exhibition for

the last thirty years in which one or more of the paintings have not been based on a passage in Tennyson. This year certainly is no exception. I once began making a list of the novels in England and America whose titles are drawn from his works. It is, I can assure you, a long list. But there are better tests than these. Take any dictionary of quotations and note the space allotted to Tennyson. As FitzGerald said long since, 'Tennyson has stocked the English language with lines, which once knowing one cannot forgo.' In his own language,

> Jewels five-words-long,
> That on the stretched forefinger of all Time
> Sparkle for ever.

Take any Anthology of English poetry, I will not say take the Second Series of the 'Golden Treasury', for Mr. Palgrave, who owed so much to him in compiling the First, may be thought to have been partial, but take for instance the 'Tauchnitz Poetry Book of Modern English Poets'. See the place he occupies. I will instance one because it is among the most recent and has a significance of its own. It is a little collection[1] compiled the other day by three young girls, ranging in age from six to sixteen, on the principle of putting in the pieces which they and their friends have enjoyed. Tennyson and Scott have there thirteen pieces each. Only one other poet has as many as seven. I can only compare his popularity with that of Virgil, who was at once the hero and favourite of the city crowd and the provincial empire of the Rome of his day, and yet appealed at once and lastingly to the scholar, the statesman, and the philosopher. Will Tennyson's fame and prominence endure like that of Virgil? Who shall say? Like Virgil, in his own lifetime, he experienced many veerings of the fickle breath of the *popularis aura*. Like him he was criticized by poetasters and pedants,

[1] 'The Tripled Crown.' Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, London, 1908.

accused of plagiarism, affectation, and preciosity. He could not help feeling the criticisms, but he did not greatly heed them. What he thought may be best read in his own words in the little 'fable', as he calls it, entitled 'The Flower', of which he may be said to have given a comic version in an impromptu on 'Popularity', preserved in the 'Life', or again set out at length in the notable and inspiring allegory of 'Merlin and the Gleam', written, as his son says, for those who cared to know about his literary history, or briefly touched in the delightful little piece already alluded to, 'Poets and Critics,' in which he sings—

> What is true at last will tell:
> Few at first will place thee well;
> Some too low would have thee shine,
> Some too high—no fault of thine—
> Hold thine own and work thy will!
> Year will graze the heel of year,
> But seldom comes the poet here,
> And the critic's rarer still.

I ought to warn you that I myself am the most 'thick-and-thin' admirer of Tennyson of my acquaintance. My own feeling may best be expressed in what D. G. Rossetti wrote near the end of his life to an artistic friend: 'One can never open Tennyson at the wrong page.'

I find it difficult to imagine that some of his lines and pieces can ever be ignored or pass away, that the world will ever forget the author of

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways
> Lest one good custom should corrupt this world.

or,

> But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still!

or,

> 'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.

or,

> Not once or twice in our rough island story
> The path of duty was the way to glory.

or, the 'Flower in the Crannied Wall', or 'Wages', or 'Crossing the Bar'.

What I would build on, if I attempt judicially to estimate his value as a poet, is his affinity with those poets who have lived and lasted down the ages.

> His likeness to the wise below,
> His kindred with the great of old.

To me he seems like Virgil and like Horace, like Chaucer and like Spenser, like Milton and like Gray. True and sympathetic to every fact and every *nuance* in the loveliness of nature, humorous in the observation of men, various as the whole gamut of human interest, deep in scholarly culture, in art rounded and finished, in expression exquisite—his place is surely with them. Yet after all what is literary immortality? He did not himself build on earthly immortality, or live for it. He felt, more perhaps than any other poet, the vastness of the universe as revealed to us by that modern science which he studied so incessantly and expressed so eloquently. His was 'a tiny spark of being' amid its 'deeps and heights', and yet, tiny spark that it was, it was a spark of an imperishable fire and had a value for himself and for its Creator. It is a theme he often hand ed, most aptly perhaps for us this evening in the noble piece 'Parnassus', published in his eightieth year, with which, should time permit, this Lecture will conclude.

Looking back over the hundred years, at the end of which we stand to-day, let us endorse the verdict pronounced by Oxford half a century ago: let us at any rate be thankful for his life and his life's work.

> Render thanks to the Giver,
> England, for thy son!

What he was to his own age remains as a great fact. He was the voice of the Victorian era, and those who wish to know what that voice was, even if it has, amid

the new aspirations of another century, but a faint appeal to them, though to my mind, and I believe to that of many, his message is still potent and unexhausted, must go to him to learn it. Yes, let us be thankful for his life and for his example. For—as he himself has said so finely in the first piece I heard him read,—he was fond of reading it—

> For tho' the Giant Ages heave the hill
> And break the shore, and evermore
> Make and break, and work their will;
> Tho' world on world in myriad myriads roll
> Round us, each with different powers,
> And other forms of life than ours,
> What know we greater than the soul?
> On God and Godlike men we build our trust.

Belief in God, belief in the value and the immortality of his own existence, on these he built. He held by that old threefold cord, not easily broken, of Faith, Hope, and Love.

> We have but Faith: we cannot know;
> For Knowledge is of things we see;
> And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
> A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Faith at times might falter, but it returned again and yet again, and was stronger than ever at the last.

Hope might falter even more.

Love, that 'greatest of the three', was the strongest.

In his earliest days he formulated and proclaimed his creed.

> The poet in a golden clime was born
> With golden stars above;
> Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love.

Throughout his life this was what he sought to give and longed to receive.

Let us repeat that tribute which in the hour of their bereavement comforted more than any other those who were near and dear to him, and offer yet again 'love and reverence to the memory of him who above all things loved Love!'

PARNASSUS

Exegi monumentum . . . .
Quod non . . . . . .
Possit diruere . . . . . .
. . . . . innumerabilis
Annorum series, et fuga temporum.

HORACE.

I

WHAT be those crown'd forms high over the sacred fountain?
Bards, that the mighty Muses have raised to the height of the mountain,
And over the flight of the Ages! O Goddesses, help me up thither!
Lightning may shrivel the laurel of Caesar, but mine would not wither.
Steep is the mountain, but you, you will help me to overcome it,
And stand with my head in the zenith, and roll my voice from the summit,
Sounding for ever and ever thro' Earth and her listening nations,
And mixt with the great Sphere-music of stars and of constellations.

II

What be those two shapes high over the sacred fountain,
Taller than all the Muses, and higher than all the mountain?
On those two known peaks they stand ever spreading and heightening;
Poet, that evergreen laurel is blasted by more than lightning!

Look, in their deep double shadow the crown'd ones all
disappearing!
Sing like a bird and be happy, nor hope for a deathless
hearing!
Sounding for ever and ever? pass on! the sight
confuses—
These are Astronomy and Geology, terrible Muses!

III

If the lips were touch'd with fire from off a pure Pierian
altar,
Tho' their music here be mortal, need the singer
greatly care?
Other songs for other worlds! The fire within him
would not falter;
Let the golden Iliad vanish, Homer here is Homer
there.

From 'Demeter and other Poems' (*published* 1889).

Oxford: Printed by Horace Hart, M.A., Printer to the University

Pamph
LE
T.B
W

Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 1st. Baron (1809-1892)
Warren, Sir Thomas Herbert (1853-1930)
The centenary of Tennyson.

University of Toronto
Library

DO NOT
REMOVE
THE
CARD
FROM
THIS
POCKET